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AUTHOR Current, Richard Nelson
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ABSTRACT

A complete history is provided of the Phi Beta Kappa society, tracing its growth from a local debating club to a national organization which today boasts a quarter of a million members. The history charts the society's development and reveals the friction over the shift away from the classics toward liberal education and the electives system, the growing respect for scholarship among students (in 1917, the most socially accepted grade was C, the so-called "gentleman's grade"), and the unprecedented enrollment after World War Two. The society's many achievements are outlined and its continuing influence on liberal education stressed. In addition, an examination is made into the society's grudging admission of women and blacks, the uproar over Paul Robeson's selection for the editorial board of the American Scholar, and other controversies. Appendices contain a listing of society chapters by order of founding and alphabetically by institution. Contains 109 references and an index. (GLR)

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